

# First breeding record and passage of Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* in Libya

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**Première mention de nidification et passage de l'Épervier d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* en Libye.** La découverte est rapportée de deux nids occupés d'Éperviers d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* au nord-ouest de Cyrenaica, Libye, en mai 2008. Le premier était dans une plantation de pins au nord de Cyrene, près du complexe hôtelier de Muntasah Shahhat, le second environ 1,2 km au sud-ouest du premier, dans une zone clôturée ayant l'aspect d'un parc. Des plumées contenaient des plumes d'une Tourterelle des bois *Streptopelia turtur*, d'un Coucou gris *Cuculus canorus* et de 11 passereaux qui se trouvent dans la région comme espèces nicheuses ou de passage. Ceci constitue les premières mentions de nidification de l'Épervier d'Europe en Libye. Deux observations en mars 2009 à Wadi Ash Shati, les premières pour cette espèce au Fezzan, pourraient indiquer que ce rapace est aussi un visiteur hivernal plus fréquent qu'on ne le pensait jusqu'à présent.

In North Africa, Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* is known to breed in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (race *punicus*: Orta 1994) and as a regular passage migrant or winter visitor (the European nominate race: Isenmann & Moali 2000, Thévenot *et al.* 2003, Isenmann *et al.* 2005). According to Bundy (1976), it is only a winter visitor to Libya, where it has been infrequently and irregularly recorded from November to April in Tripolitania, mainly in the coastal region.

Other sightings confirm the rarity of the species in this region (Misonne 1973, Brehme *et al.* 2002). The few records from Cyrenaica are from the coast and Jebel Akhdar in November–April. However, the species is also stated to be occasionally 'fairly common' (R. S. M. Green *in* Stanford 1953, 1954, Latham 1973). In the Libyan Desert there have been a few spring observations in March and April (Bundy 1976).

**Table 1.** Analysis of the material found in the pluckings at Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* nest sites near Cyrene, Libya, in May 2008.

**Tableau 1.** Analyse du matériel trouvé dans les plumées auprès des nids d'Éperviers d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* près de Cyrene, Libye, in mai 2008.

Location: A = wood near the Muntasah Shahhat hotel complex, B = wood on the northern periphery of the city of Cyrene. \*probably part(s) of a plucking.  
Location: A = bois près du complexe hôtelier de Muntasah Shahhat, B = bois à la périphérie nord de la ville de Cyrene. \*faisant probablement partie d'une plumée.

| Species                                                                            | Number | Location | Remarks                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------|-----------------------------------------------|
| European Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>                                    | 1      | A        | Juvenile                                      |
| Common Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i>                                               | 1      | A        | 2 undertail-coverts, 1 tertial*               |
| Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>                                              | 1      | B        | Adult, 1 tail feather, 1 secondary*           |
| Tree Pipit <i>Anthus trivialis</i>                                                 | 1      | B        | 2 tail feathers                               |
| Eastern Olivaceous Warbler <i>Hippolais pallida</i>                                | 2      | A        |                                               |
| warbler <i>Phylloscopus</i> sp.                                                    | 1      | B        | 1 tail feather*, probably <i>P. collybita</i> |
| Blackcap <i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>                                                 | 1      | B        |                                               |
| Sardinian Warbler <i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>                                      | 1      | B        | Adult male, 1 primary*                        |
| Pied Flycatcher <i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>                                          | 1      | A        |                                               |
| Blue Tit <i>Parus caeruleus</i>                                                    | 1      | A        |                                               |
| Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i> or House Sparrow <i>P. domesticus</i> | 1      | A        |                                               |
|                                                                                    | 3      | B        | 1 adult + 2 juveniles                         |
| Chaffinch <i>Fringilla coelebs</i>                                                 | 10     | A        | 9 juveniles + 1 adult                         |
|                                                                                    | 5      | B        | 4 juveniles + 1 adult                         |
| Goldfinch <i>Carduelis carduelis</i>                                               | 1      | A        | Juvenile                                      |



**Figure 1.** The pine plantation near the Muntasah Shahhat hotel complex, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, where the first nest of Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* was found, 27 May 2008 (J. Hering)

La plantation de pins près du complexe hôtelier de Muntasah Shahhat, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, où le premier nid d'Épervier d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* a été trouvé, 27 mai 2008 (J. Hering)

**Figure 2.** Female Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* near its nest in the pine plantation near the Muntasah Shahhat hotel complex, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libya, 27 May 2008 (J. Hering)

Épervier d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* femelle près de son nid dans la plantation de pins près du complexe hôtelier de Muntasah Shahhat, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libye, 27 mai 2008 (J. Hering)

**Figure 3.** Occupied Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* nest in a pine tree, Muntasah Shahhat hotel complex, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libya, 27 May 2008 (J. Hering)

Nid occupé d'Épervier d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* dans un pin, complexe hôtelier de Muntasah Shahhat, Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libye, 27 mai 2008 (J. Hering)

**Figure 4.** The pine plantation on the northern periphery of the city of Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libya, where the second nest of Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* was found, 29 May 2008 (J. Hering)

La plantation de pins à la périphérie nord de la ville de Cyrene, Cyrenaica, Libye, où le second nid d'Épervier d'Europe *Accipiter nisus* a été trouvé, 29 mai 2008 (J. Hering)

In May 2008 we visited Cyrenaica, where we concentrated our observations in the north-west. In a pine plantation of several hectares, at c.600 m, near the Muntasah Shahhat hotel complex, Cyrene (32°49'N 21°52'E; Fig. 1), on 27 May, we discovered a Eurasian Sparrowhawk's nest, from which the female flushed, uttering loud alarm calls. The bird was not particularly shy and permitted us to approach to within 20 m (Fig. 2). The nest, which was lined with white down, was in a fork on the trunk c.10 m high and c.30 m from the forest edge (Fig. 3). We also found another nest, undoubtedly from the previous year, in the centre of the small wood c.50 m from the first. Several moulted feathers belonging to the female, including four primaries, two secondaries and a single tail feather, were found on the



forest floor, as well as the remains of 19 birds of six species of passerines, a European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur* and a Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* (Table 1), all of which are known breeding birds or passage migrants in Cyrenaica (e.g. Bundy 1976).

Two days later, we found a second occupied nest, c.1.2 km south-west of the first, in an enclosed park-like area on the northern periphery of the city of Cyrene at c.615 m (32°49'N 21°52'E; Fig. 4). It was at a height of c.15 m, also in a fork on the trunk, within a very sparsely wooded pine plantation of c.5 ha. During our presence the male vocalised continuously. We found five primaries and a secondary of the female as well as 12 pluckings of seven locally occurring songbirds (Table 1).

These two occupied nests at the end of May agree temporally with the findings of Isenmann & Moali (2000) and Isenmann *et al.* (2005), who give the breeding season for Eurasian Sparrowhawk in Algeria and Tunisia as mid April to the beginning of June. Based on habitat in the region, and possibly also in other suitable areas of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, we believe that the Eurasian Sparrowhawk breeds here, especially where pine plantations occur.

The present status of this raptor as a rare visitor to Libya also needs to be questioned. During an 11-day visit to Fezzan in March 2009, we saw Eurasian Sparrowhawks twice: on 28th an individual, probably an adult male, flew over the administrative centre and on 30th an immature female flew over a cultivated area of the Al Dabwat Agricultural Production Project radial oasis complex, in Wadi Ash Shati (27°38'N 14°08'E) (Hering *et al.* in prep.). These birds were probably returning from their winter quarters in Niger or Chad, of which little is known at present (cf. Brown *et al.* 1982). These are the first records for this part of the country.

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